

Training Module #1:



Caring for Your Customer and Yourself

Introduction

This print module was produced by the Michigan Judicial Institute (MJl) specifically for Michigan Court Support Personnel.

The intent of this print module is to provide staff with information on the following topics:

- ❖ legal advice
- ❖ customer service
- ❖ communication skills
- ❖ and personal safety skills

The information is presented in a quick-read format and is intended to serve as a tool for learning, reflection, and dialogue.

This print module may be used as a stand-alone training tool or incorporated into a facilitated training session.

For inquiries on this or other available Michigan Judicial Institute training resources, contact MJl at (517) 373–7171.

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Quotes for Reflection

“A Gallup Poll conducted for the ABA Journal in 1994 showed that 96% of Americans believed in the concept of equal justice, but only 3% felt that it existed now, and only 14% felt that it was very likely to be achieved in the near future. A recent poll in California revealed that 52% of the public rated the current court system as poor or fair.”

“All employees . . . need to ask how they can perform their responsibilities in a manner that allows other employees to do their jobs better.... The work of every court employee affects the work of other court employees. Every employee is in fact the customer of another employee.”

“The goal of the Alaska Court System is to serve our customers courteously and efficiently. Customers are, of course, the general public, but they also include other court employees, employees from other agencies, attorneys, and defendants. Good customer service should be the goal of every employee not just those working the front counter!”

“Customer Service In The Courts” by Roger Warren of the National Center For State Courts.
Publication: The Court Manager, Summer 1996, pp. 11–15.

What Is and Is Not Legal Advice?

“How do I know what is and isn’t considered legal advice?” This is perhaps the number one question asked by court clerks. Court clerks have a tremendous amount of knowledge about the court system. They are supposed to provide information as part of their duties. When a clerk properly provides information it facilitates court users access to justice. If a clerk gives legal advice however, it may deny or discourage access to the court or may even encourage litigation. How, then, can they know when they are crossing that invisible line into legal advice?

Continued on next slide . . .

What Is and Is Not Legal Advice?

Source: MJJ Publication “*Legal Advice v Access to the Courts*”. This publication available through the Michigan Judicial Institute (517) 373-7171.

Here are some specific guidelines that may help:

CAN provide:



- ❖ Legal definitions
- ❖ Procedural definitions
- ❖ Citations of statutes, court rules, and ordinances
- ❖ Public case information
- ❖ General information on court operations
- ❖ Procedural options/choices
- ❖ Access
- ❖ General referrals
- ❖ Forms or instructions on how to complete forms

CANNOT provide:



- ❖ Legal interpretations
- ❖ Procedural advice
- ❖ Research of statutes, court rules, and ordinances
- ❖ Confidential case information
- ❖ Confidential/restricted information on court operations
- ❖ Opinions on how to proceed
- ❖ Barriers to court access
- ❖ Subjective or biased referrals
- ❖ Any parties with substantive content for forms

What Do Customers Want?

MJI Seminar: "Top Quality Customer Service" presented by Murlene McKinnon, CEO, MACNLOW Associates
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1200 Hamilton Court, Menlo Park, California 94025

While the cartoon below is humorous, you have probably been in the position of "customer," where you were less than happy with the service you received. If you can remember how that clerk's actions (or lack of action) affected you as the customer, you will have insights into the quality of service you can provide for your customers.



Customers may want a variety of responses from you, including:

- ❖ To be taken seriously
- ❖ To be treated with respect
- ❖ To get immediate action
- ❖ To gain compensation/ restitution
- ❖ To have the party who wronged them reprimanded or punished
- ❖ To clear up the problem so it never happens again
- ❖ To be listened to

POINTER: Deal with the emotion first and then the problem. (see next page)

Words That Make a Difference

MJI Seminar: “*Top Quality Customer Service*” presented by Murlene McKinnon, CEO, MACNLOW Associates
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The words you use with customers can foster communication or undermine communication.

Here are some communication helpers.

- ❖ **Keep it impersonal to avoid causing defensiveness**

If a customer did something wrong, point out the mistake indirectly.

EXAMPLE: “There are a few areas on this form that we need to complete.”

- ❖ **Use “I” instead of “you”**

Don’t blame or belittle the customer. Acknowledge the problem using “I”.

EXAMPLE: “I can see there’s been a miscommunication.”

- ❖ **Avoid giving orders**

People don’t like to be given orders. Rephrase your statement as a question.

EXAMPLE: “Would you mind waiting while I speak with my supervisor?”

- ❖ **Take ownership in solving the problem**

Even if it isn’t your job duty, always try to locate someone who can help.

EXAMPLE: “I don’t have that authority. Let me see if Mary can help.”

Important Words to *Forget*

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- #10. “It doesn’t matter what I do—I’m only one person.”
- #9. “I’ll change just as soon as everyone else does.”
- #8. “Do as I say, not as I do.”
- #7. “That’s their opinion....what do they know?”
- #6. “Because I said so, that’s why.”
- #5. “I win and you lose.”
- #4. “It’s not my job.”
- #3. “I don’t care.”
- #2. “Those people.”
- #1. “ME”

Listening Habits Checklist

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Put a check in front of the items below that you are already doing well.

Put a circle in front of the items that you could improve on. Be honest with yourself!

- ☐ Focus on what the speaker is saying—not how he/she is saying it. Ignore any accent, dialect, grammatical errors, “ums” and “uhs”.
- ☐ Listen carefully for emotions as well as facts.
- ☐ Take a few brief notes of important details, like dates, times, amounts, etc.
- ☐ Pay close attention when you are helping any person. People can quickly tell when you are not paying attention.
- ☐ Listen fully to the customer and eliminate whatever distractions you can.
- ☐ Pleasantly ask people who are upset or frustrated to slow down; share with them that it is easier to understand information one piece at a time.
- ☐ Avoid letting upset customers push your buttons when they call you names or behave inappropriately. You need to be in control if you are going to find a solution to the situation.
- ☐ Do not interrupt or finish another person’s sentences.
- ☐ Work on eliminating your prejudices. It is hard to listen when you’re distracted by how someone dresses, uses make-up, or wears their hair.
- ☐ Look people in the eye. People see you are listening when you look at them.
- ☐ Repeat what you understand the speaker to be saying. Start with “Let’s see if I understand. What you are trying to say is....”

Find the Hidden Message

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THREE WORD HIDDEN MESSAGE:

WORDS TO FIND: (Read instructions below first) *Accept, Add Value, Behaviors, Celebrate, Change, Coaching, Commitment, Diversity, Effectiveness, Empathy, Feedback, Fun, Grow, Leadership, Learn, Listening, People, Recognition, Rules, Solutions, Support, Think, Values*

HOW TO PLAY: All the “Words To Find” above can be found in the puzzle—horizontally, vertically, diagonally, or backwards.

1. Find the words in the puzzle. Cross out each of the individual letters of each word. DO NOT CIRCLE THE ENTIRE WORD!
2. As you find and cross out each of the letters in the word, underline the word in the word list. DO NOT CROSS OUT WORDS IN THE WORD LIST. UNDERLINE THEM.
3. After you have found all the words in the puzzle,
4. Cross out each of the remaining A's and M's. The remaining letters make up a three- word message. Write that message on the lines above.

Answer: Don't forget these.

N	O	I	T	I	N	G	O	C	E	R	M	D	T
O	C	F	R	U	L	E	S	M	H	M	A	R	S
S	E	E	L	P	O	E	P	T	N	A	O	G	S
R	L	E	A	Y	M	A	P	G	A	P	N	T	E
O	E	D	A	A	T	E	N	M	P	I	F	G	N
I	B	B	M	H	C	I	O	U	H	E	S	A	E
V	R	A	Y	C	N	R	S	C	G	U	O	M	V
A	A	C	A	E	M	G	A	R	A	L	L	A	I
H	T	K	T	N	R	O	K	E	E	A	U	M	T
E	E	S	R	O	C	T	N	A	T	V	T	A	C
B	I	A	W	M	H	A	I	A	M	D	I	M	E
L	E	A	D	E	R	S	H	I	P	D	O	D	F
L	V	A	L	U	E	S	T	E	S	A	N	U	F
T	N	E	M	T	I	M	M	O	C	A	S	E	E

Skills Assessment

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How did you do?

Add up your points.

If you scored:

70–85 points:

You're a wizard!

50–65 points:

Room to grow

30–45 points:

Better stop & think.

0–30 points:

Time to face the
music.

Circle the appropriate number for each skill listed.

SCORING KEY: 1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Usually 5=Always

WHEN DEALING WITH A CUSTOMER, I . . .

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| — stay calm | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — don't interrupt the customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — focus on concern without getting distracted | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — ignore personal accusations and deal with resolving the issue | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — do not become distracted by awaiting paperwork or incoming calls | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — have attentive body posture | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — have appropriate facial expressions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — have confident eye contact | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — listen completely without interruption before responding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — take notes when appropriate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — let customers know offered assistance is genuine | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — know when to call on other staff for assistance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — have a confident helpful tone of voice | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — use words that avoid escalating anger | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — avoid blaming the customer or my fellow workers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

WHEN A CUSTOMER LEAVES, I . . .

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| — am in control of my emotions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — don't repeat the story more than once | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| — analyze what was done and what needed to be done differently | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Additional Pointers

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TIME OUT:

- ❖ If you find yourself becoming upset, wanting to cry, or to YELL! at a customer, allow yourself a “time out.” Excuse yourself politely: “Excuse me a moment while I check the policy on this.”



CRYING:

- ❖ Upset customers may say things that are hurtful. Whatever you do, don't cry in front of the customer. Excuse yourself and go to any empty office or rest room. Ask one of your colleagues or supervisor to take over. If other staff members are not available, use the “Time Out” option above.

GETTING CUSTOMER'S ATTENTION:

- ❖ If the customer is ranting and raving, use his or her name at the beginning of the sentence. Most people stop and listen when they hear their name.

IF THE CUSTOMER IS OBSTINATE:

- ❖ Make comments that lead the customer to find a solution: “What would you like me to do to assist you?”

POLITE REPETITION:

- ❖ If the customer keeps insisting on something that's unreasonable or impossible, keep repeating what you can do without becoming hostile or loud. Eventually you may be forced to ask the customer to leave. If the customer refuses, then call security or police as your court's policy indicates.

Dealing With the Threat of Violence

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Never try to reason with a drunk or drug user. Even if there’s no sign of drug use, if the person appears potentially violent, don’t be reluctant to call the police. It’s better than ending up in the hospital.

Never accuse a customer of being drunk or on drugs. This can expose you and your court to liability.

There may be occasions when an enraged customer threatens you or becomes violent. Rely on your gut feeling if it seems things are getting out of hand.

Learn to look for potentially violent behavior by reading the non-verbal communication of the customer:

- ❖ Clenched fists
- ❖ Tight lips
- ❖ Agitated tone of voice
- ❖ Tense body posture
- ❖ Flared nostrils
- ❖ Red face
- ❖ Wide eyes

Dealing With Abusive Customers Over the Telephone



It is critical that your voice tone be pleasant, concerned, patient, informed, and caring.

If telephone customers are verbally abusive, tell the customer you have to leave the line to check on the policy. If they would like to hold, get their telephone number in case you are disconnected. If they would like you to call back ask what time would be convenient to return the call.

You may still be annoying to customers if you have habits such as chewing gum, eating, covering the receiver to talk to co-workers, or leaving customers on hold too long. Be aware of these habits when you interact with telephone customers.

Three “A’s” of Personal Safety

The three A’s represent the major decision steps in maintaining safety when confronted by a client, customer, or another whose behavior is threatening, aggressive, and potentially violent.

AWARENESS is the sum total of information you have accumulated about the nature of aggression. The more knowledgeable you are about this subject, the greater the likelihood of avoiding dangerous situations.

ASSESSMENT refers to the process of quickly and accurately evaluating a specific situation in which you feel at risk. In assessing a situation it’s important to take note of where you are and who is involved. You need to assess:

1. Avenues of escape/retreat
2. Number of people nearby who may help
3. Availability of back-up
4. Logistical advantages/disadvantages of furniture arrangement
5. Presence of makeshift shields/weapons of opportunity
6. Evidence of substance abuse

ACTION is what we take in a potentially volatile situation based on the interplay between our knowledge and experience. Remember to stay calm, breathe deeply, and use positive and affirming self-talk.

Position Yourself for Safety

Source: MJJ Magistrate Seminar “*Personal Safety Skills Training*” presented by Joan Nelson of SafeSense, Inc.

When you are faced with the emergency of threatened assault, try to:

- ❖ Maintain a minimum distance of two arms’ length. Doing so keeps you slightly out of range of strikes, grabs, sudden lunges.
- ❖ Angle your body at 45 degrees. This renders your center line less accessible, allows fuller use of peripheral vision, and sets you up to run to safety.
- ❖ Keep your hands free and in front of your body. In this way your hands are available for blocking if the need arises. Avoid folding your arms, jamming hands in your pockets or clasping hands behind you.
- ❖ Be sure that you are not blocking an agitated person’s line of escape / retreat.
- ❖ Position yourself behind a barrier of some sort, if possible, e.g., desk, large chair, sofa, counter, table, etc.
- ❖ Remember to keep your voice calm, firm, and slow. Listen closely, acknowledging the agitated person’s feelings. Explain your intentions, and convey your expectations. Use the person’s name and keep requests simple and specific.

“Quality comes from
a quality culture . . .
quality comes from people.
It happens one day at a time,
one person at a time,
one behavior at a time.”

Organize

Breathe

Stay healthy

Smile

“You only serve as good as you feel. You need to take care of yourself. And you are the only one who can.”

Kristen Anderson, Ron Zemke
“Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service”

Smile Relax

Take time out